

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANA 0680

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINR
SUBJ: PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI ON INTERNAL SITUATION

BEGIN SUMMARY: IN OPEN AND THOUGHTFUL DISCUSSION PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI DESCRIBED THE DIFFICULTIES HE AND HIS GOVERNMENT FACE IN GOVERNING YEMEN BUT EMPHASIZED THAT HE WILL PERSERVE IN HIS MODERATE PATH TO ESTABLISH A PROGRESSIVE AND STABLE GOVERNMENT. AL-HAMDI SAID TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL HE PLANS TO HOLD A SERIES OF PUBLIC MEETINGS OVER THE NEXT YEAR OR SO AS A WAY OF DECIDING WHAT YEMEN'S POLITICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL FUTURE WILL BE. AL-HAMDI EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR MY OBSERVATIONS ON THE NEED FOR GREATER POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN YEMEN. AL-HAMDI NOW APPEARS TO HAVE A GOOD IDEA OF WHERE HE WANTS TO GO IN YEMEN AND DESPITE THE POLITICAL ZIGZAGGING WILL CONTINUE TO MOVE TOWARDS HIS LONG-TERM GOAD. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING MEETING WITH PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI IN TAIZ ON FEBRUARY 13, WE DISCUSSED THE CURRENT INTERNAL SITUATION AS WELL AS AL-HAMDI'S IDEAS ON YEMEN'S POLITICAL FUTURE. IN A VERY OPEN AND THOUGHTFUL MANNER AL-HAMDI DESCRIBED THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH HIS GOVERNMENT FACES IN TRYING TO CONFIDENTIAL

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MODERNIZE BOTH YEMEN'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES. HE SAID THAT ON THE ECONOMIC SIDE HE BELIEVES THAT DESPITE PROBLEMS LIKE INFLATION YEMEN IS FINALLY BEGINNING TO MOVE AHEAD. ON THE POLITICAL SIDE, HOWEVER, THERE ARE STILL DIFFICULTIES STEMMING FROM THE LONG YEARS OF IGNORANCE AND ISOLATION TO WHICH THE YEMENI PEOPLE WERE SUBJECT.

2. AS HE HAS SAID IN THE PAST TO ME, AL-HAMDI STATED THAT YEMEN FINDS ITSELF IN A DIFFICULT POSITION BETWEEN ON THE ONE HAND ONE OF THE RICHEST AND RELATIVELY CONSERVATIVE STATES IN THE ARAB WORLD AND ON THE OTHER HAND ONE OF THE POOREST AND PERHAPS MOST RADICAL. HE SAID THAT HIS GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO STEER A MIDDLE PATH IN WHICH YEMEN'S CITIZENS WILL ENJOY FREEDOM, POLITICAL STABILITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ENABLING THEM IN TURN TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL POTENTIALS WITHOUT FEAR OF EITHER RACIST OR EXTREMIST REPRESSION. AL-HAMDI ACKNOWLEDGED THAT YEMEN HAS A LONG WAY TO GO AND THAT THERE ARE ELEMENTS WITHIN THE COUNTRY WHICH DO NOT AGREE THAT YEMEN'S MODERATE ROAD IS THE BEST WAY TO PROCEED. IN THIS CONNECTION HE NOTED THAT SOME OF THE SHEIKHS, LEAD BY ABDALLAH AL-AHMAR, STILL THINK THAT THE BEST WAY TO RUN THE GOVERNMENT IS AS IF IT BELONGED TO THEM PERSONALLY AND THAT BY DOING FAVORS TO THEIR FRIENDS THEY WILL BE ABLE TO STEM THE RISE OF LEFTIST EXTREMISM.

3. AL-HAMDI EMPHASIZED THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES ARE STRENUOUSLY OPPOSED TO BOTH THE EXTREME RIGHT AND THE EXTREME LEFT, BUT THAT THEY UNDERSTAND THAT THE MODERATES WILL BE THREATENED FROM BOTH SIDES.

4. ALHAMDI WENT ON THAT AT PRESENT HE ENVISAGES A PERIOD OF PERHAPS LASTING A YEAR DURING WHICH AN EFFORT WILL BE MADE TO BRING MORE AND MORE PEOPLE INTO SOME SORT OF CONSULTATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOVERNMENT. HE NOTED THAT THERE HAVE ALREADY BEEN SEVERAL "POPULAR" MEETINGS HELD IN HODEIDAH IN WHICH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COOPERATIVE MOVE-
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MENT, THE CORRECTION MOVEMENT, THE GOVERNMENT, PROFESSIONAL CLASSES, THE ULEMA AND THE SHEIKHS ARE MEETING TO DISCUSS HOW YEMEN SHOULD PROCEED TOWARDS A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER. HE STATED THAT THERE WILL BE FURTHER MEETINGS OF GROUPS LIKE THIS AROUND THE COUNTRY IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH A CONSENSUS BEFORE MAKING FINAL DECISIONS AS TO WHAT TYPE OF CONSTITUTION YEMEN SHOULD HAVE AND WHEN ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD.

5. I NOTED THAT AT PRESENT THE GOVERNMENT UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP IS ENJOYING WIDESPREAD SUPPORT IN YEMEN. GIVEN THE DIFFICULTIES OF GOVERNING YEMEN AND THE ABSENCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL, HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT WILL BEGIN FACING DIFFICULTIES OVER THE COMING YEARS BECAUSE MANY OF ITS PROMISES DESPITE ALL GOOD INTENTIONS WILL NOT BE MET. SPEAKING AS A FRIEND, THEREFORE, I SAW THE NEED FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO CONSIDER HOW TO ESTABLISH SOME SORT OF REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS BOTH AS A MEANS TO EDUCATE THE YEMENI PEOPLE IN THE WORKING OF DEMOCRACY AS WELL AS TO PROVIDE SOME SORT OF ESCAPE VALVE FOR

POPULAR DISCONTENT. I NOTED THAT IN THE EARLY DAYS OF OUR REPUBLIC WE TOO WERE FACED WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WHO WERE ISOLATED AND TO SOME EXTENT UNEDUCATED BUT THAT WE PLUNGED AHEAD WITH POPULAR ASSEMBLIES AND SELF-GOVERNMENT AS A WAY TO MAKE THE PEOPLE AWARE OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AS WELL AS TO CONVINCE THEM THAT THEY HAD A STAKE IN THE GOVERNMENT.

6. AL-HAMDI AGREED THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO BEGIN THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL EDUCATION IN THE COUNTRY AND KAGUMK THAT THIS IS HIS GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION OVER THE MONTHS AHEAD. HE REPEATED, HOWEVER, THAT THE JOB IN YEMEN IS GOING TO BE DIFFICULT BUT THAT HE APPRECIATED MY OBSERVATIONS AND WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS YEMEN'S POLITICAL FUTURE WITH ME. HE SAID HE HOPED WE COULD DO THIS AGAIN BECAUSE HE VALUES THE OPINIONS OF FRIENDS LIKE THE UNITED STATES.

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7. COMMENT: THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT AL-HAMDI REALLY OPENED UP WITH ME ON THE SUBJECT OF THE INTERNAL SITUATION IN YEMEN. IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HE HAS BEEN DOING A LOT OF THINKING (AS WELL HE SHOULD) ABOUT WHERE YEMEN AND HIS GOVERNMENT ARE GOING. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT HE NOW HAS A GOOD IDEA OF WHAT HE WANTS TO DO AND WHERE HE WANTS TO GO. YEMEN'S POLITICAL TOPOGRAPHY, HOWEVER, LIKE ITS MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN, REQUIRES A LOT OF ZIGZAGGING TO GET FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER. WHETHER HE REACHES HIS GOAL OF A STABLE AND PROGRESSIVE YEMEN REMAINS TO BE SEEN BUT SO FAR AL-HAMDI HAS SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE A MASTER AT ZIGZAGGING AS A WAY OF GETTING WHAT HE WANTS.

SCOTES

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